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FOR EUR A/S JONES AND DAS CONLEY FROM AMBASSADOR

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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

Classified By: Ambassador Earle I. Mack for reasons 1.4(B) and (D)

1. (C) Beth, I would like to ask for your support and assistance in requesting that the President meet bilaterally with Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen on February 22 on the margins of the U.S.-EU meeting in Brussels.

2. (C) To the best of our knowledge, the two leaders have never met -- and certainly not since Vanhanen became Prime Minister in June, 2003. Vanhanen has requested a meeting repeatedly since he was newly elected, and it has been discussed frequently at Embassy levels. A bilateral meeting would help establish a relationship that could pay off handsomely in the months to come. Finland will assume the EU Presidency in July of next year, and if the Constitution Treaty takes effect as planned in November 2006 the Finns will be the transition team that guides the Union into the EU's new structure. PM Vanhanen will likely head that team and the presidency of the EU during that period. Thus it would be extremely beneficial for the President to have met with him early on, to cement a relationship. In addition, Vanhanen has given indications, publicly and in private conversations with me, that if prospects look favorable, he would like to run for the Finnish presidency in 2006. As you know, he represents the Center Party, while Tarja Halonen is SDP, and Vanhanen's popularity rating is second only to Halonen's. It is possible Halonen may not even run, in favor of a high-profile world humanitarian post (such as UN Secretary General).

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3. (C) If a President-PM meeting were held, it should focus on shared values. These shared values have given rise to U.S.-Finnish cooperation in many of the areas highest on the U.S. agenda:

-- The two nations' commitment to democracy in Iraq. Finland does not have troops on the ground, but they were the first to pledge support for the UN protection force, and made good on their one-million-euro pledge as soon as the trust fund was set up last month. They also have police trainers in Amman (they started with five and increased it to ten), and they have told us that if the EU were to establish an office in Baghdad to assist the Iraqis with building the institutions of civil society, they might be able to contribute civilian experts.

-- The two nations' shared dedication to reconstruction in Afghanistan. The Finns have made clear they are in for the duration. They have done a considerable amount, given the size of their resources. They have 20 troops and three civilians in the UK/Finnish/Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team in Meymaneh in the north, 60 CIMIC troops in Kabul, and even a half-dozen firefighters in the Nordic team at Kabul airport. They have contributed ten million euros to humanitarian assistance, and will contribute ten million more this year, making Afghanistan one of the single largest country recipients of their humanitarian aid.

-- Worldwide resolve in the face of international terrorism. When the U.S. embassies in this region issued their warden messages last October 30 -- an extraordinary event in this neighborhood, where people still believe 'it can't happen here' -- Vanhanen told the press that "warnings of this kind are always taken very seriously." Combating terrorism is one of the themes of the new GoF white paper on security policy that was issued to great fanfare in September and endorsed by Parliament last month.

-- Support for Turkish EU accession. Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn is also Center Party, and was appointed by Vanhanen; former President Ahtisaari, who chaired the independent commission that did the study of Turkey and the EU, is a vocal proponent of Turkish membership. Finland took an early, proactive position on the issue, and will remain a key player in EU deliberations and a natural U.S. ally.

-- Stability in the Balkans. The Finns were the first non-NATO nation to lead a regional contingent in KFOR, and will be playing an important role in EUFOR. In doing so, they acknowledge the importance of the U.S. (In an April

speech to Center Party colleagues, Vanhanen said, "We should remember how toothless Europe stood ten years ago when Yugoslavia fell apart. Without the U.S. the conflicts of former Yugoslavia could not have been handled.")

-- Our shared commitment to progress in human rights, including in battling trafficking in persons. The Finns currently hold the de facto Nordic seat on the UN Commission on Human Rights, and consult closely with us on UNCHR issues.

They are working their way back from the debacle of being the only EU nation placed in Tier 2 of the 2003 TIP Report, and have in place a new anti-trafficking law, with penalties that have real bite, and a government working group on TIP. A meeting could acknowledge this progress.

-- Cooperation on nonproliferation. The Finns quickly signed onto the Global Partnership (which the G-8 acknowledged at Evian), and firmly support the Proliferation Security Initiative. As Russia's neighbors, they are as concerned as we by the environmental and security risks of the decaying post-Soviet Russian nuclear establishment.

14. (C) We have told the Finns, with no minced words, that they would have to bring deliverables to such a meeting. We know they have gotten the message. From our side, we believe that a meeting would pay dividends during the Finnish EU presidency and for some time to come. Of all of Finland's senior leadership, PM Vanhanen has been the most consistent in support of the American agenda, and he places strong emphasis on the critical importance to Finland and Europe of trans-Atlantic relations. Recognizing this fact could reap significant rewards. If you agree, I hope you will recommend such a meeting to the White House.

15. (U) With warmest regards -- Earle  
MACK